Rousseau and the Arts in Modernity *

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I thought it desirable to begin our discussion of the Writer in the Contemporary World with reflection on Rousseau's Letter to d'Alembert in order to remove ourselves at least somewhat from the bien pensant atmosphere which tends to prevail at such gatherings. The tendency is to bemoan the persecution or dishonor of art and artists and to affirm the right of free artistic expression, a right trampled on by tyrants everywhere. This occurs at a time when we are perhaps more incapable than we ever have been of explaining to ourselves what art is and whether it is good or not. Rousseau has the temerity to pose these questions in such a way as to infuriate modern consciousness and hence to cause serious reflection. By raising these questions he cannot avoid taking censorship seriously and hence thinking the one thing most contemporaries want to be absolutely unthinkable. Rousseau, because he took art seriously in an age when its respectability was insured largely by treating it as a harmless diversion, was constrained to investigate what is poetry's relation to civil society and how it fits into the economy of a whole individual as well as the status of the poet's claim to truth. Poetry as a claimant to special attention and special rights makes implicit claims about the good life which must be made explicit.

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Rousseau's text is of particular interest for two reasons: In itself it resurrects the old tradition of poetics initiated by Plato and canonized by Aristotle. And, in reinterpreting that tradition, Rousseau founded the peculiarly modern "aesthetics" under the influence of which we all more or less consciously live and which sets the horizon within which we see the problem of the arts. In scrutinizing Rousseau's vision, we may ourselves be enabled to discern problems and alternatives which escape us due to our living within that horizon, to our taking it for granted. It must be remembered--and it is too easily forgotten--that Rousseau was not just another abstract critic of the arts, but was himself a supreme artist. Not only did his rhetoric get a hold over the enthusiasms of multitudes of writers for over a century, he played the decisive role in the emergence of the novel as the art form. His rejection of the theater is not a rejection of the arts; at most the ambiguity of the arts that rejection reveals prepares the way for new forms of art. Rousseau really founded the three dominant kinds of novel in the nineteenth century--the romantic novel (Nouvelle Heloise), the Bildungsroman (Emile), the confessional novel (Confessions). Goethe, Stendhal and Tolstoy, to choose only a few leading national examples, were enchanted by Rousseau's way of seeing things.

The drama which Rousseau chooses to create with this little book itself depicts the essential choice for the arts. It is Rousseau against Enlightenment, Genevan culture against

French civilization. I use this latter formulation advisedly, for it was Rousseau who invented the distinction between culture and civilization which has had such a powerful effect on the self-understanding of artists. Culture is the profound phenomenon which the true artist expresses and even creates. It is national and expressive of a unity of thought and feeling, speech and deed, inner and outer. Civilization is the superficial, artificial, and cosmopolitan phenomenon founded on and attempting to cover over man's dividedness between instinct and duty, selfishness and society. Hence it is hypocritical and encourages vanity--wanting to appear to be something in the eyes of others, rather than to be something really. The poet in this world is an entertainer, not really an artist. From this very simple beginning point we can already grasp very much of what Rousseau teaches about the artist. He must remind men of what is honest and be the defender of viable ways of life which preserve human wholeness against the invasion of an abstract universality which ultimately reduces man to the common denominator of self-preservation.

This mise en scene of Rousseau's is perfectly mirrored by one of his great readers, Tolstoy, in War and Peace, where Russia takes the place of Geneva. Russia resists the assaults, military and intellectual, of France, which represents universal enlightenment. The contrast is between Petersburgh society with its use of the French language, imitation of French ways and its amour-propre and true Russianess and naturalness (although

the relation between this latter pair is complicated, reflecting a complication in Rousseau himself). Speransky's reformisnm is the opposite of Kotuzov's union with the Russian spirit. Andrei is the failed attempt to be a serious man within the cosmopolitan framework of the West, while Pierre is a human success because he can purge the alien temptations from himself in favor of his instinctive rootedness. The novelist counterposes the charms of French sophistication and its contempt for the coarse, uncivilized backwaters with a picture of superior depth which touches sentiments of patriotism and family. This is precisely the same strategy Rousseau uses in the Nouvelle Heloise. His art is fuelled by a new kind of sentiment and passion.

Geneva is used by Rousseau to illustrate his rejection of the fundamental premise of Enlightenment and hence of modern intellectual life altogether. That premise is, precisely, that there is a parallelism between intellectual progress and political or moral progress. This means, in practice, that the advance of civilization is measured by freedom for the arts and the sciences. Geneva does not permit the theater and, therefore, impedes progress. So it appeared to the Encyclopedists who made it their business to shame the leading citizens of Geneva into relaxing their moralistic grip on the city's spiritual life. Rousseau, an enlightened man, a friend of reason and the arts and the sciences, nevertheless took a stand against the admissiion of the theater, thus siding with narrow prejidoce

and religious fanaticism, wishing to deny his fellow citizens the civilizing advantages of the inspiration of French theater. What was at that time a shocking action on Rousseau's part proves immediately intelligible to all of us because Rousseau's position lives on in the efforts of "cultures" to resist Westernization or Americanization, or in the efforts of nations to preserve their traditions from the homogenizing effects of technical rationality. So successful was his argument that art and artists--as opposed to science and scientists--seem in their highest incarnations to be the spokesman for that point of view. It is now almost forgotten that very great writers--like Moliere and Voltaire--thought very much in terms of a cosmopolitan education of man. We still see the decadent remains of that view in the popular culture of blue jeans, coca-cola and rock music which penetrates everywhere, attaching itself to the passions of the young and constituting an international community of taste with which older tastes can neither compete nor co-exist. One cannot conceive of a youngster whose passions are inflamed by Mick Jagger or Michael Jackson being inwardly faithful to his ancestral pieties, nor can it be conceived that a way of life that admits of popular culture be one which has room for the sacred. These things are mutually exclusive. What is now called Americanization is just the direct heir of French Enlightenment whose proponents were perfectly aware that they were carrying on a conspiracy against the old order everywhere, the charms of which they were willing to subvert in the name of freedom, reason, peace and

civility. Although they did not foresee how low the cosmopolitan culture would be, they were clearly aware of and ready for the sacrifice of national ways of life and characters for the sake of the advantages foreseen. Art itself would adapt to this kind of entertainment required for a new kind of man, one less affected by prejudices of class, country and religion.

Rousseau's use of Geneva is, in the first place, just a reminder of the classic tension between the demands of free civil society and intellectual freedom, a tension which is elaborated most fully by Plato at the very origins of political philosophy and whose analysis Rousseau simply adopts in this book. True republican self-government requires a small community, common beliefs and tastes and austere moral virtues. The pleasures and pains of the members of the community must attach them to that community and be in harmony with its needs. A man whose pleasures are those of a courtier of Louis XIV can hardly adapt himself to the humble egalitarian life and simple amusements of a Sparta or a Geneva. As soon as his passions go flying off elsewhere, in his heart he hopes for a change of regime. Genevan censorship is not the repression of a tyrant but the self-imposed sacrifice of the citizens at large trying to maintain the pleasures and pains suitable to their political order. The introduction of a theater would not only materially change the conditions of life, it would permit the indulgence of dangerous passions which have not precisely been repressed but sublimated

or rechanneled, combined with duties and made into moeurs or mores. Moral life requires habits and reverence for antiquity; intellectual life requires freedom from habits and a spirit of innovation. You have to make civil society over in order to provide the atmosphere in which everything can be thought and everything said. Large nations with great wealth where one depends upon orderly administration--i.e., bureaucracy--rather than the virtue and public-spirit of citizens are most appropriate to the flourishing of the intellectual life. Writers in particular have an ambiguous relation to decent civil societies. They are the ones who know the passions and whose works must appeal to them. Their greatest charm consists in discovering and giving voice to the hidden wish, to exploiting the fault-lines in the apparent unity of virtues, the unavowed blasphemy, the hidden adulterous longing, the longing for freedom from the law's constraints, the ambition to rule. The dramatists need the virtues of political and moral men and women, and they also need to show the imperfect unity in their souls. The poets were always aware of their ambiguous relation to civil society and the special risks they run and their special responsibilities. What is best for them is not necessarily or always what is best for the community and in many ways they are its corrupters. This complicated relationship had been simplified by Enlightenment, and Rousseau speaks as much for the sake of the arts--the artist's clear self-awareness--as for the sake of the city and freedom. Enlightenment had taken away the artist's responsibility and

given him a simply good conscience, a good conscience that remains in the liberal understanding of the arts. But this has the effect of trivializing art. Rousseau surely begins from a rugged--even self-consciously philistine--defense of morality, but thus he restores gravity to the arts.

The very new situation of the arts in modernity is, according to Rousseau, intimately related to the new metaphysics which has succeeded in dominating Europe and of which the Encyclopedie was only the vulgarization. Its heroic advocates in the seventeenth century were Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke, although in the decisive respect they all had a common source of inspiration in Machiavelli. The central aim of that movement was to tame or even excise the activity of imagination in man's soul. This revolution was announced by Machiavelli in the famous chapter xv of The Prince where he states that the mistake of the entire tradition of moral and political philosophy was to elaborate imaginary republics and principalities on the basis of which real republics and principalities were judged. Machiavelli argues that the traditional myths are purely the products of imagination, as is the perfection of man toward which they point. The true world is covered over by images; the world as we see it is primarily a product of poetry. If one purges the world of imagination, one sees the true motives of men and the causes of things. An enormous effort of self-overcoming is required to keep man from seeing the world as

he wants to see it. Philosophy had always attempted to overcome the effects of mere imagination in seeing the world, but the radical new endeavor was to break entirely with common-sense or pre-scientific experience, to do without the images or forms of things, in forming judgments. Descartes' radical doubt, the wiping clean of the slate of consciousness to replace the old hieroglyphs with mathematical concepts, is just one form of a common effort: reject cherished impressions of things in the name of certitude, of never being fooled. Thus, at the outset, modern philosophy was hostile to the faculty which makes poetry possible. The great instrument and invention of modern philosophy is method, and method has as its primary goal to render men independent of imagination. Every schoolchild was to be taught, and has been taught, a way of distinguishing between what he should take seriously and what is only play: the former is science, the latter all the modes of imagination.

Both the condition and the result of the new method is a liberation from all authority, particularly religious authority. Nature, uncovered, can, in Bacon's formula, if tortured, be made to reveal her secrets, and man, in Descartes' formula, can become "master and possessor of nature." What is today called "disenchantment" or "demythologization" was, in principle, achieved in the seventeenth century. The low but solid ground from which the new philosphy began was chosen in order to do away with the charms of revealed religious texts by crippling

the sensations and the passions which give credence to the Biblical miracles. The greatest danger politically and philosophically from the point of view of the founders of modern philosophy and science is fanaticism. Belief in revealed authority is the cause of one of the greatest plagues mankind has known--the religious war. Related to this phenomenon is the power of priests who represent the powers invisible and who repress man's desire to taste of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The project of these thinkers was to lame religion, by depriving one foot of the spiritual ground on which it stood, by replacing the other foot with artifical miracles--those of applied science, more certain and useful than the Biblical miracles.

Thus, prophecy or revelation was interpreted as wholly a product of the imagination and hence as a kind of poetry. From the outset, one of the most characteristic and profoundest aspects of poetry--its relation to religion, whether as its spokesman or its maker--was explicitly excised. Of all the high human activities, art was the one most transformed by the new philosophic dispensation. The systematic denial of the possibility of revelation means that the Muses can no long sing to the poets. And the poetry and poets who had eschewed the Muses in favor of mirroring nature, those poets who had long since come to terms with philosophy, have found themselves gazing at a nature in which there is nothing to see; atoms moving according to mathematical laws admit of neither beautiful nor moral refle-

ctions. To the extent that Enlightenment rules the mind of man, neither God nor nature support the activity of the poet.

The method and metaphysic of Enlightenment have, according to Rousseau, extreme consequences for man's self-understanding and his goals. The expectation of another life as well as the other kind of immortality arising from the hero's fame both lose their plausibility in the modern dispensation. Man is part of nature as is anything else, nature as it was being so successfully interpreted by the new natural science. Man wishes to preserve himself. That is the bottom line. All the things for which he is willing to risk his life reveal themselves as imaginary. The famous state of nature, an invention of the seventeenth century thinkers, is an attempt to use the imagination to imagine the condition of man in the world prior to its having been mythologized by imagination. At whatever version of the state of nature you look--whether it is Hobbes' Locke's or Rousseau's--you find man struggling to preserve himself in a world where the only realities are the quest for food, shelter and sexual satisfaction and defense against diosease and other men. Love, attachment to country and fear of God are absent, all the things which fascinate man in the depictions of life from Homer and Moses on down. The state of nature is the moral and political equivalent or corollary of Descartes' radical doubt, allowing man to be seen as he really is and giving him guidance as to how he should act, the ought following inevitably from

the is. Man is one, everywhere and always, and nation and religion which separate men from one another, are artifacts, misleading him about his true interests. Safety and comfort are the only real concern for men always and everywhere, and recognition of these facts leads to a will to peace and the exercize of reason in the service of the purely natural passions. One kind of regime is desirable and legitimate everywhere--the regime which allows man freedom for life, liberty and the pursuit of property. The ultimate selfish atom is the true account of man. Following nature can lead to sensible, attainable solutions. Political regimes should be dedicated to the protection of the rights of man. That is the function of the legislator, not to make men, as Aristotle would have it, "good and doers of noble deeds."

It is obvious that this solution is exceedingly unpoetic. None of the beautiful or noble activities of man which are the proper subjects of epic or drama can be found in the state of nature. The subject matter of epic or tragic poetry vanishes when man becomes essentially a being concerned with rational self-preservation. And so does its audience if the listeners cannot share the characteristic passions of the heroes and poetry cannot point to another, higher, way of life. Literature can only be distraction or amusement for such an audience when philosophy has persuaded it that there are no higher concerns which should temper its relentless concern for self-interest. The poetic

cannot enthuse men toward other goals and feelings when principle justifies them in self-satisfaction with those they most powerfully and instinctively possess.

The science of man--and its progressive permeation of the world of practice--which accompanied the science of nature produced, in Rousseau's analysis, a new human type to which he was the first to give a name, one whose descriptive power has had unending effects: the bourgeois. The bourgeois is the divided man who has no true self, who thinks only about others when he is alone, and only about himself when he is with others. His personality, or rather lack thereof, follows immediately from the new nature of man. If man is by nature a selfish, isolated being, then he cannot care for others. This is harmless to the extent that man is solitary. But if he lives together with other men, and particularly if he needs other men, he not only does not have the inclinations required for community, he must positively hate all those other selfish beings who do not desire to serve him, on whom he depends and whose good will he must court. His dependency--and this dependency is ever increasing if complicated social arrangements are required for satisfying his needs and wishes--turns him into a relative being, but one who longs to be absolute. Civil society, like all other relations, is a contract with no more status than other contracts which are entered into for private and selfish reasons. Man's goals are safety and comfort, but his pursuit of them leads

him into a complicated web of psychological relations with other men, all of which can be summarized by the expression amour-propre and constitute a continuous dialectic of mastery and slavery. Man can be whole alone, and he can be whole by being made into a citizen in the ancient sense. Otherwise he will always be torn between his natural selfishness and the moral demands of community or civil society. He will be neither natural nor social. He will be nothing. Civilization is this dividedness. Civility is just the veneer which covers over men's separatedness and essential relation of competition and hostility. The bourgeois is an unartistic and hypocritical being. Rousseau's criticism of the artists of the Enlightenment is that they are the fabricators of this veneer, of politeness which only masks pettiness and ugliness and contributes to a dwarfishness of man whose sentiments are petty and covert. The bourgeois is, according to Rousseau, the peculiarly modern type, and the greatest danger to both freedom and human fullness.

His criticism of Voltaire and Moliere is exemplary of his view. The modern heroes are unreal, strictly histrionic, for there is no great politics, nor are there heroic sentiments in the audience. It is all entertaining rhetoric which does not serve a spiritual function. Voltaire's play Mahomet or Intolerance--dedicated with his graceful irony to the Pope--has as its real purpose to expose religious fraud and counter fanaticism. It is meant to encourage reasonableness and make the

enthusiastic appear dangerous. In other words, if it is not precisely propaganda, it certainly supports and encourages the easygoingness which was becoming the way of the world. Similarly, the marvelous criticism of Moliere demonstrates that that sublime comic poet always ridiculed his objects of attack against the standard of phlegmatic reasonableness. All virtue had become social virtue, the traits of character required for getting along comfortably and urbanely. Although Moliere picked on real vices, they were shown to the audience to be vices by appealing to their desire to be men of the world, persons who would never be laughed at by Parisian mondaines. The culmination of Moliere's art is the ridicule of real virtue as opposed to the virtues which allow one to get along easily. The Misanthrope is a man who takes virtue as an end in itself seriously. He is not a utilitarian, and in the eyes of utilitarians he is ridiculous; he gets into all kinds of trouble because he thinks honesty is not a policy but a duty. Those who laugh at this believe, and are encouraged to believe, that this is a very great error. Rousseau unreservedly takes the side of the Misanthrope and starts the movement which ends in Kant's moral teaching. Moliere is an accomplice in depreciating the status of morality in the name of promoting peaceful social life, and his success is vouchsafed by the fact that this is what his audience in its heart of hearts wants to see.

Now this defines the problem that Rousseau addresses.

The Misanthrope is the good man, but Moliere, and a fortiori, the other artists of his time, could not make him an object of admiration. Rousseau was not a propagandist nor was he a sermonizer. He knows that art must please; that men must want to see it and hear it. The audience is bourgeois, and the task is to please it and raise it above itself at the same time. Only enthusiasms cause men to forget their selfishness. In general, there are three kinds of enthusiasm: religion, patriotism and love. They are the sources of the sublime in the soul. But each is dangerous, particularly the first two. Rousseau was largely in accord with the desire to temper their sanguinary fury that motivated the Enlightenment. But he thought that they are not the only danger, and he was persuaded--as has been a large part of the tradition which followed him--that reason leads only to selfishness.

This is why he made a brilliant defense of fanaticism, as opposed to calculating reason, because the former is self-forgetting and elevated and bespeaks noble concern. Rousseau experimented with rhetorical and poetic appeals to such enthusiasms. His Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar is an attempt to make a place for religious abandon within the limits of tolerance. And, of course, Rousseau is the founder of an egalitarian heroism which was intended to animate the new politics and counterpoise its dreary economism. Most of all, he concentrated on love and made marriage and adultery the pre-eminent theme

of the novel for over a century. These were the correctives he contrived for the failings of modern philosophy.

In order to accomplish all this, Rousseau was constrained to rethink modern philosophy as no one else did. He had to establish the possibility of a truly human world, even though modern science, the truth of which he accepted, had subverted the world of human meanings, moral and artistic. Religion had become the kingdom of darkness, the fantasy world manipulated by tyrants. Country was just the set of myths used by powerful exploiters to insure their domination. The sublime had been reduced, just as the specific difference between man and brute had been reduced. Rousseau thought this through, and his meditation resulted in what is perhaps the most stunning peripety in the history of philosophy. Modern philosophy was right in discerning that there is no ontological ground for the beliefs man has always had about the existence of forms, about the beautiful order of the cosmos. Poets thought they were talking about God, heroes and love--that they were describing realities which they somehow saw. In fact, it was the reverse; they were the sources of their objects. Modern philosophy had demonstrated this and unawares had demonstrated the independence and power of the human spirit. That philosophy had in its radicalism shown what reason can know and had separated out imagination from reason. But in so doing it did not properly assess that man possesses this useless, or worse than useless, faculty,

imagination. Imagination, purged of reason, turns out on reflection to be the distinctively human faculty. Man is the imagining, not the rational, animal. To amputate imagination is to maim man in his essence. Imagination, banished in ignominy, is led back gloriously to be the ruler. Philosophy itself for the first time gives precedence to poetry, for it demonstrates that what we now call values are the products of poetry. This was always so, but for the first time this has become self-conscious.

Simply stated, Rousseau says that the poet is a creator. He may well have been the first to say so, but if he was not absolutely the first, he was the first to give the notion systematic significance. Long usage has so trivialized the idea of creativity that it has ceased to have much meaning, and we have lost sight of how problematic, paradoxical and shocking is the assertion that man is creative. In the first place, the assertion is blasphemous. Creativity was the preserve of one being, God, and creation out of nothingness is in itself miraculous, or the ground of all miracles. God created man. The reversal is total. Man created God. Man is outside the chain of necessary causation. Poetry is independent of and superior to reason. The principle of contradiction does not apply to the poet. He is not an imitator of nature, but the maker of a world. The poet is the complementary man, and the activity of his imagination is the alternative to the bourgeois' reason. The drama criticized in the Letter to d'Alembert is art which has not

fully emancipated itself and is the unwitting tool of Enlightenment, contributing to its vices. The public festivals in Geneva which express the wholeness of public life are models for what the poets should do consciously. Art as the creator and expression of a unity of thought and deed in man is Rousseau's goal, and in this he is at one with the other two great philosophers of poetry, Plato and Nietzsche. The wholeness of man is their primary objective. Rousseau addresses the peculiarly modern form of dividedness, the oppositions between nature and society, sentiment and reason, inclination and duty, and argues that these oppositions can be overcome only by creative or poetic synthesis, a synthesis for which there is no natural guidance. The poet is the true hero, and the alternative to the bourgeois. The self-examination of the poet as the most interesting human type has been the theme of literature since Rousseau. The peak of humanity comes to be understood not as rational contemplation, but the imagination's self-assertion.

A simple, but nonetheless revealing example of what Rousseau intended is love. Naturally, according to Rousseau, the relation between the sexes is strictly animal. There is no eros, or longing for the beautiful or for spiritual union. He cites with approval Lucretius' comic and ugly description of love and sex. For Lucretius, this description is meant as a countercharm, to liberate men from the illusions of love, to warn them not to expect more than the carnal satisfactions,

and to calm their spirits for contemplative activity. Rousseau draws precisely the opposite conclusion. The real is ugly, the contemplative does not produce an independent satisfaction and human relations are not benefited. The illusions which intense sexual longing produce are beautiful and elevating. Such illusions adorn the world and, although the vision of the beloved object is only an illusion, the moral effects on the soul of the lover are real. Plato is right: the soul takes flight only on the wings of eros, but he is wrong in thinking that there is a real beauty by nature. The beautiful is an illusion created by the poetic imagination. The relation of sexual desire to imaginary objects of perfection is sublimation. The poet creates the sublime and sublimates man's soul. The beautiful woman whose soul contains virtues even more beautiful than the body's beauty and who can only be possessed by a single man whose virtues are equivalent to hers, is the best motive for the moral life and a worthy object of the writer's narrative. What modern man has is easy satisfactions, and what he lacks is great longings. The poet is the fabricator of the objects of longing. Rousseau is the founder of romanticism in the general and in the particular sense of the word: (a) longing is preferable to any available satisfaction; (b) the relation of love between the sexes is the most interesting and poetic of subjects. Stendhal, explicitly following Rousseau, the supposedly cynical Stendhal, avows that it is much more interesting to be Werther than Don Giovanni. This is the measure of the change of taste in life

and literature wrought by Rousseau.

The poetic introduction of the ideal into sex, rather than repressing it or exploiting it, was Rousseau's solution to many problems. Love as a basis for human relations is nobler than calculation. The modern contract leaves individuals essentially as atoms, separate from one another, except accidentally. The love relation, precisely because it is passionate and unreasonable, can constitute real unselfish units out of couples without contradicting man's natural selfishness. Neither is religious terror or belief in original sin necessary to control sexual lust, nor is overcoming it by love of gain and calculation of profit required. Sex is self-regulating if guided by love. The passion most easily touched and the one most easily informed by idealism is sex. To it the poet must turn. To speak with Goethe, the Eternal Feminine always leads man upward. Moreover, from couples come children and hence family units. A decent civil society can be made out of family units. The only other possibilities are the selfish individuals of modern liberalism or the fanatic, denaturing patriotism of Sparta and early Rome. Neither liberal dividedness and insincerity nor ancient self-overcoming is required for whole men. Further, this is an egalitarian view of human dignity and produces an art more honest and within the range of a democratic audience. Not Plutarch's heroes who conquer the world, but St. Preux trying to conquer Julie is the proper and salubrious image for the modern sensibility. (Think again

of War and Peace.) The novel, simple, private and accessible to all, replaces the theater with its artificiality, its cardboard heroes, its corrupt actors and actresses and the luxury it induces. The understanding of and the elaboration of the complementarity of the two sexes restore, for Rousseau, the beautiful as well as man's wholeness. The impulse he gave to the modern novel in this respect alone was overwhelming.

The other great moral corrective to modern liberal politics contrived by Rousseau, in addition to love, is compassion. It, too, is an affect of the imagination and is also set in motion by poetry. The combination of fear and suffering, plus the flattery to one's amour propre caused by the sight of the suffering when one is not suffering oneself, establishes a sweet set of emotions in the soul and encourages fellow-feeling, rather than rivalry. The depiction of the poor, the simple, the oppressed, is both a salubrious and an affective mode of stimulating sociable deeds. This is the other great moral strand set in motion by Rousseau's novelistic art. The compassionate lover is the modern hero.

Rousseau, single-handedly, by his writings and his own life (which he publicized in them) created the pathos of the modern artist--a bohemian, living on the fringes of society, inimical to it, but necessary to it, sincere in a hypocritical world, longing, pregnant, but full of torment because he fights

not only evil but nothingness, always on the edge of the abyss, with an infinite responsibility for maintaining humanness in a world where nothing supports it other than his unsupported creativity.

Out of Rousseau's struggle there emerged the new philosophic dualism which has characterized late modernity, nature and freedom, with its two corresponding human products, science and art. The bourgeois and civilization are allied with science, the creative man and culture allied with art. Kant's philosophy was but the first attempt to put in systematic order the complex whole which Rousseau's meditation on the condition of modern man brought into being. No intellectual discipline has been the same since; our sense of what is moral and beautiful has been deeply affected; and politics, whether it is of the right, the left or the center, is all somehow Rousseauean. With particular reference to the subject of our discussion, the new science, aesthetics, is almost entirely a result of Rousseau. Aesthetics implies that art belongs to a separate dimension of reality with different foundations which protect it from the encroachments of natural science. Kant's Critique of Judgment, within the system of the three critiques, attempts to ground a use of the mind which allows for judgments of teleology and of the beautiful and sublime, while still accepting the integrity of modern physics. This encapsulates Rousseau's project and defines the centrality of the artist.

In my view, Rousseau established the atmosphere in which art--and I mean not only literature but music and painting as well--has moved. The way we think about art has been decisively affected by him directly, and indirectly by those who followed him. I do not argue that every great artist had to undergo his influence or that his teachings were used as textbooks by great artists (although his influence and the imitation of him was much more common than is now known and even some of those who thought they opposed him were really working within his articulation of things). But I do argue that any thinking of art in our time means, at least partly, to rediscover and rethink Rousseau, whether to undergo his inspiration or to liberate ourselves from it and seek for real alternatives to him. I believe him to have been a very great man indeed, one who never wrote anything lightly, whose every opinion was arrived at with powerful reasoning and awareness of all the possible serious counter-opinions, as well as with real demonic possession. Everyone should be enchanted by him at least once, but it is also possible that disenchantment is also required. Kant said that after reading Emile, he did not think about it for a week because he feared that its immediate charm was too great for him to think clearly about it. And that was Kant!

Without attempting to refute Rousseau or even adequately

expound him, I would like to conclude by listing a few of the general themes which arise out of his understanding of art, which have persevered and which are for me problematic, although I have no solutions for the problems.

(1) The condominium of science and art may well be a shotgun wedding undertaken to preserve the honor of art and imagination, one in which one party will ultimately have to accept the other's domination. Either all things are determined by mechanical necessity or there is freedom. The co-existence of the two views seems implausible. Either all things are reducible to simples like atoms or there are permanent forms. One cannot change perspectives for one's convenience. Older philosophy had a place for freedom and forms, but the success of modern physics and astronomy makes it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain that older philosophy. However, the impossibility of an older, more congenial kind of thought, does not mean that there is a new and consoling way of thinking of these things. Perhaps we must engage in the difficult task of questioning the truth of that impressive science instead of trying to close it up in a cage and hoping it won't bite. The fact is that over the last two centuries this inhuman and unartistic science has gradually extended its domain over the theoretical and practical world leaving art to snarl at it and occasionally to identify itself with the most irrational counterrevolutions. There is in the world of humane letters a haunted sense of listlessness

and groundlessness. We are left with reason and art occupying two hostile camps, a most unhealthy situation. This is peculiarly modern, and it is no accident that the two modern thinkers, Nietzsche and Heidegger, who paid the most attention to art, who identified the creative act with the plenitude of humanity, were political extremists, real enemies of democracy, as well as of reason. I do not suggest that this proves they were wrong, but it does seem that one should not lightly echo the chatter about art and creativity with which our ears are filled.

(2) Connected with the foregoing is the whole notion of creativity. Does it really make sense to think of man as making something from nothing or as the maker of the world's order and meaning. One wonders if this view does not inevitably culminate in despair and nihilism--in spite of all the gay talk about creativity one hears on American TV. Is not the soul truly conscious of limits which it did not make and to which its highest powers are subservient? There is in creativity a repulsive religiosity, i.e., not religion but a weak-willed and self-indulgent desire to have all the advantages of religion without believing in God, a lack of hard-headedness about the meaning of humanism, a blurring of the opposition between reason and revelation. None of this is meant to suggest that the real world as we know of it from our science, is a world in which we can life satisfactorily. But the preference for commitment over reason which permeates so much of modern writing threatens

the only tattered remnants of decent freedom which remain in the world and does not evidently save art.

(3) Does the definition of the artist as the anti-bourgeois not lead to irresponsibility? No single description by a writer has had such far-reaching effects as Rousseau's characterization of modern rational man as the bourgeois. This was really his alternative description of Locke's rational and industrious man on whom modern liberal regimes were to be founded. Rousseau combined profundity of observation with rhetorical genius to establish a tradition of judgment which still endures today. The bourgeois is the enemy. Rousseau had his good reasons for deprecating narrow self-regarding as the principle of society. He wanted to remind men of the noble. But, after having seen Nazis and Communists, it is hard to believe that the bourgeois is the worst human type, to be avoided at all costs. But it still goes on. In artistic consciousness nothing is more repulsive than the bourgeois, at least in the West. The Communist has never gotten a really bad reputation, and the Fascist is most respectably interpreted as a kind of bourgeois. One has to admit that concern for prolonging life, comfort and earning money do not provide themes for great poetry. But artists have at all times had to come to terms with the vulgar and the petty. And in this case the vulgar and petty motives are vitally connected with free institutions. It is not only or primarily that such views are subversive of liberal democracy that they are problematic.

It is rather that art becomes negative, reactive and irresponsible. On a high level one can see the destructive, poisoning effects of this hatred of the bourgeois in the work of Flaubert who seems to have had only this one passion. The artist becomes, as Mann put it, "the bourgeois with a guilty conscience." Instead of seeking for a ground of its own, art defines itself by what it is against and is infected with that haunted sense of groundlessness, that it deals only in illusions, of which I have spoken. Hatred of the bourgeois allows one to identify with and support whatever might supplant or destroy bourgeois society. Finally, the artist becomes parasitic on bourgeois society, the mere opponent who amuses the bourgeois. Flaubert portrays this marvelously well as Homais gradually becomes an amateur of the arts and adopts bohemian ways.

Related to this is the currency in one denomination or another of Rousseau's distinction between the good and the moral. This is a profound and complicated issue in Rousseau, but one can crudely say that the good is the natural and the sincere, and the moral represents the artificial and the social (although for Rousseau, as for Kant, the moral can be the higher of the two). The moral easily becomes identified with bourgeois morality, i.e., with repression and hypocrisy. In the opposition between nature and civilization the choice, particularly the artist's choice, is almost inevitably nature. This distinction was very rapidly absorbed into the literary tradition. In the

Prologue in Heaven, Faust is said to be good, while he is surely not moral. The consequence is simple: In Shakespeare no immoral character fails to be punished and none can be a hero; in Balzac, not to mention the extreme cases, many immoral characters succeed and are admirable. Vautrin could not flourish in Shakespeare's world. This is a most problematic aspect of modern literature.

(4) In the Letter to d'Alembert Rousseau makes all the good arguments against love as a thematic interest in drama. But he tries to avoid the risks and use the interest, for he believed it was one of the few, and perhaps the only, motive left on which an artist can work in modern times. He looked forward to writers like Jane Austen or Tolstoy to use sexual passion as a moralizing influence. One wonders whether it was not inevitable that the possible combinations of moral loves would be exhausted within some finite time, leaving the concern, and the legitimization of the concern, without the sublimation. This is particularly true inasmuch as love for Rousseau is explicitly an illusion. The result is loveless sex as the most significant theme without its having any significance. Rousseau built a shining tower with very delicate materials on a solid but tawdry foundation. The tower collapsed, leaving the foundation intact. Freud and his views on art are the uglification of the sublime.

(5) On the one hand Rousseau contributed to a retreat of literature from the political world into the private life, into the small but really moving concerns of ordinary life and

ordinary people. But, on the other hand, culture as opposed to civilization required the hand of the artist. The creation of a unified national perspective out of disparate influences is a work of art. Artists began to regard themselves as founders and legislators, taking on infinite prophetic responsibilities. The risk is that this might compromise the independence and distance of the artist and tempt him into the histrionics of which Nietzsche justly accused Wagner. The ultimate and most dangerous temptation is the still prevailing will among artists to invent new gods or to despair if they cannot. A second risk is that political power, persuaded of the centrality of art by the idea of culture, will take too great an interest in art. It is striking how silent about art are the philosophers who conceived liberal democracy, as are, for example, also the founding documents of the United States--the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Federalist Papers. Artists are in no way encouraged, but they are left alone to enjoy the freedom, security and prosperity guaranteed to all practitioners of harmless pursuits. But it is Facist and Communist regimes which have ministries of culture. Science they have been constrained to leave more or less free. But culture belongs to them, and many Western intellectuals regret that there is no minister of culture to take them seriously. It is perhaps depressing to note that no American president since Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, and before them only Lincoln, and before Lincoln only the Founding Fathers, had anything that could remotely be qualified as a

literary or artistic taste. But Hitler and Stalin had very definite tastes and were critics and philosophers. Perhaps something in the ideas of creativity and culture makes artists forget the eternal in the name of the splendid present. One can well wonder whether Wagner's German nationalism or Dostoyevsky's pan-Slavism and many other such phenomena have been an unqualified blessing for art or for politics.